DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 655 CS 212 147

AUTHOR Boyd, Peggy A.
TITLE Journal Writing: An Exploration of Topic Selection and Spelling Development in a Kindergarten Class.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 31p.; M.A. Thesis, University of Alabama, Birmingham. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Little Rock, AR, November 8-10, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Dissertations/Theses - Master Theses (042)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Journal Writing; *Kindergarten; Primary Education; *Spelling; Writing Exercises; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Childrens Writing; *Spelling Growth; *Topic Selection

ABSTRACT

A study examined topic selection and spelling development in kindergarten students' journal writing. Subjects, 19 kindergarten students enrolled in a middle-class school, were informally interviewed about their writing. The students' writing topics were categorized and their spelling analyzed. Results indicated that the children were able to select their own topics for writing and that, without corrections from the teacher, the children moved toward the conventional spelling of words by experimenting as they wrote. (Three tables of data and 9 figures are included; 20 references and a developmental spelling test are attached.) (RS)

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JOURNAL WRITING: AN EXPLORATION OF TOPIC SELECTION AND SPELLING DEVELOPMENT IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASS

by

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fullfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Education in the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

1988

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on two aspects of journal writing in kindergarten: topic selection and spelling development. What topics did the children select for writing? Could they easily decide on topics to write about? Did they require adult suggestions or help from others to decide on a topic? As children begin writing, do the letters that they write resemble the letters in the conventional spelling? How does the spelling of words change as children write more?

A qualitative approach for gathering data for the study was appropriate in order to try to understand these young children's thoughts about topic choice and spelling. Children were informally interviewed about their writing. Copies were made of the children's daily journals so that the topics could be categorized. The spelling was analyzed and compared to conventional spelling.

The results of the study showed that these kindergarten children were able to select their own topics for writing and rarely required suggestions from their teacher. The study also indicated that these children discovered how to spell words by writing. Without corrections from the teacher, the children moved toward the conventional spelling of words by experimenting as they wrote.

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INTRODUCTION

A survey by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986) showed that the writing proficiency of students at all levels of schooling was not adequate. The teaching of writing as a communication skill is almost nonexistent in the primary grades of many elementary schools. In many school systems writing is associated with the teaching of penmanship and spelling. Many teachers believe that children as young as kindergarten age are not capable of beginning the writing process or that they can choose their own topics for writing. As a result, the topics are chosen for them. Many teachers also hold the opinion that children must spell each word correctly as they write; unless children learn how to spell each word correctly, they are not learning to write properly. Writing then becomes a spelling and penmanship lesson rather than a lesson in communication.

This study looked at a group of kindergarten children as they began journal writing. The study focused on two aspects of writing: topic selection and spelling development.

What topics do kindergarten children select? As they write, do kindergarten children spell in a way that resembles conventional spelling? How does the spelling change as they write more? Current research suggests that it is important for educators to consider the answers to these questions in order to facilitate growth and increase the writing proficiency of kindergarten children.

The Sigificance of the Study

Teachers need to understand the processes that children undergo as they begin to write so that they can help children become better writers.

Teachers need to be aware that chidren have the ability to choose their own topics for writing and to know the kinds of topics children select. They also need to know that it is not unusual for children to repeat topics when they are writing. Teachers must understand that when children are asked to write about something that has no significance to them, they will not write as freely. Children will write about things that are of interest to them and will expand on their ideas. All of these facts are important for teachers to know if they are to successfully incorporate a writing program in the classroom. Continuing evaluation of children's writing will enable the teacher to adjust the curriculum to adapt to the children's writing needs.

Teachers should know that spelling, just as language, is a developmental process. Children are constantly hypothesizing about their knowledge of written language. They experiment with letters to form words. Allowing children to explore in their own way is important to spelling development. By allowing children the opportunity for exploration, writing development will be encouraged rather than stifled. An understanding of the spelling process on the part of educators will affect the kindergarten curriculum. It will enable a teacher to decide what kind of spelling program will enhance children's writing.

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In his studies of the development of thought and language, Vygotsky (1962) found that as the use of language develops in children, their utterances center around self. Piaget (1959) also noted egocentric talk during the early stages of language development. He asserted that the speech and thought of children under age seven center around self; children younger than seven do not socialize to a great extent. Children up until that time are the center of their own universe. Children talk to themselves frequently during these years. Since children are the center of their world during this period, their thoughts center around self and the world as it relates to them. This view of self as the center of the universe is what is known as egocentricity.

Does this egocentricity of thought and language also occur when children begin to write? In a study of first graders' topic selection, Manning, Manning, and Hughes (1987) discovered that while there was a wide variety of topics chosen for writing, 37% of the children in the study chose to write about personal experiences. Graves (1983) found that when children use their own topics they draw on their own experiences; their writing focuses on themselves. They are interested in events and people that are familiar and important to them. It seems natural to assume that the topics chosen by children at the kindergarten level would also reflect the children's preoccupation with themselves and the world as they see it.

Graves (1983) found that children liked to repeat topics. Hilliker's (1982) study of four kindergarten children also found that themes were repeated. The children she studied used one or more themes in their drawings. When they began writing letters to go with their pictures, the children frequently used these same themes as the subject of their journal entries.

The topic selection of these children centered around things with which the children were familiar. One child frequently used the sun as the subject of her drawings. When that child began writing letters and words in her journal, the sun was again a favorite topic. In fact, this child used the sun as a topic of her journal writing 43% of the time.

In addition to journal entries which have personal content, holidays are a popular topic for children's writing. Many of the children in Hilliker's (1982) study chose to write about holidays. Manning, Manning, and Hughes (1987) found that 12% of the journal entries in first grade related to holidays.

When children first begin using language, they do not use the correct forms of of speech. The direct teaching of language does not correct the inappropriate forms of speech used by the child. When children learn to write, they use their own concept of language and writing as well as the concepts of adults. As with language, direct teaching will not correct the inappropriate writing forms or incorrect spelling (Temple, Nathan, and Burris, 1982).

How is language development related to writing development? Writing is a transcription of oral language. Learning written language is simply a relearning of oral language (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982). Written language then follows a developmental pattern similar to oral language. The language experiences of each child differ, therefore their writing differs. But their general patterns of writing development are similar (Bean and Bouffler, 1987).

Children go through several levels before they reach conventional speech and spelling. Gentry (1987) compared spelling development with the development of language in children. First children babble, repeat isolated words, speak in phrases, and then in sentences. When learning to spell, children follow a similar pattern. Children scribble, use alphabetic symbols to represent

words, letters to represent consonant sounds, then progress to higher levels and eventually become conventional spellers.

Ferreiro's and Teberosky's (1982) research in the area of writing identified five levels of spelling development. In level one, children reproduce what they feel is the proper writing form. If the basic writing form is printing, the child uses straight lines and curves. If the writing form is cursive, children use wavy lines that appear to be copies of the cursive form.

Children at level two believe that in order to read different words there must be a difference in appearance of the written text. They write letters that more closely resemble conventional letter forms. Children continue to use the same fixed minimum number of characters. According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), children at this level may express differences in meaning through varying the order of the letters. Children at level two often have certain models that remain constant. One of the most frequently used models is the child's name.

When the child reaches level three, each letter begins to stand for a syllable. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) refer to this as syllabic hypothesis. For the first time the child associates writing with the sounds of speech.

In level four, children move from the syllabic hypothesis to the alphabetic hypothesis. They discover a need to analyze a word as more than just syllables. Children find that they have difficulty reconciling the graphic strings of letters that are found in their everyday life and reading these strings by the use of syllabic hypothesis. For example, children might try to write their name according to the syllabic hypothesis but when they visualize their name as they remember seeing it written, there may arise a conflict. At level five the child reaches the level of conventional spelling (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982).

The levels identified by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) indicate that children first use a letter string for the whole word and then attend to the parts of the word as they progress to a higher level of spelling development. Temple, Nathan, and Burris (1982) found essentially the same pattern in their studies of children at the beginning of spelling development. Rather than learning to write by mastering first the parts (letters) and then building up to the whole (words), it appears that children attend first to the whole and only much later to the parts.

Manning, Long, Manning, and Kamii (1987) described levels of spelling development they found in their study. At level one , the child wrote strings of letters. At level two, children also wrote letter strings, but they usually consisted of a fixed quantity of three or four letters. The range is usually from three to four, four to six, five to seven, or three to six letters. At level three, children used consonants to represent the consonant sounds. For example, children wrote PMNT for the word punishment. This level represents the first establishment of correspondences between what children write and what they utter. At the next level, the alphabetic level, children used vowels and consonants and spelled the word punishment as puneshmint. Eventually children reach the level of conventional spelling.

Children must be allowed to experiment when they are writing (Templeton,1980). According to Piaget (1959), children need a considerable amount of hands-on involvement before they are able to understand an experience. In his attempt to understand the process of acquiring knowledge, Piaget (1959) discovered that children obtain knowledge through their own activity. The learner need not be physically active, but must be intellectually active. Zutell (1980) demonstrated that both cognitive and linguistic process are necessary for children to become proficient spellers. In order for these complex processes to occur, children must be allowed to explore actively the use of letters.

METHOD

The kindergarten class in this study was located in a middle-class school and consisted of twenty children. There were ten boys and ten girls, of whom two were black. One of the boys moved during the course of the study and another boy moved into the class. The journals of these two boys were not considered in the study.

All of the children were observed and interviewed. For the first few times that the researcher went to the school, she observed the students before, during, and after the writing period. Each interview focused on topic selection and spelling development. Children were asked to read their journal entries and tell why they chose their topic. They were also asked how they chose the letters that were written in their journals.

Inside the classroom, the children sat at four different tables with five children sitting at each table. The seating arrangement allowed the children to naturally converse as they wrote.

Each week's journals consisted of five blank pieces of paper stapled together down the left margin of the paper. Copies of each journal entry were made and later analyzed.

The study was conducted from September 14,1987 to January 28, 1988. The observations and interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour long. The researcher was in the classroom at least three times each week.

A developmental spelling test (Manning, Long, Manning, and Kamii, 1987) was given to all of the children. The purpose of giving the test was to determine the developmental spelling levels of the children at the beginning and end of the study in order to assess their progress. The results of the developmental spelling test are reported in Table 1.

There were fifty-three days in which the children primarily did picture writing in their journals. On thirty-four days the children made journal entries that consisted of letters and words. Tables 2 and 3 show the topic categories that the children chose for journal writing. The numbers in the tables vary for each child due to several factors: children being absent; children making more than one journal entry on some days; and children making journal entries that fit more than one category. A journal entry that fits more than one category may be one such as a child writing about playing outside with his friends. This journal entry may be recorded in the categories of outside, friends, and me.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Topics about personal content were very popular with children in this study which was also found by Manning, Manning, and Hughes (1987) in their study of journal writing. Entries of personal content were focused on the children themselves, their families, friends, pets, and houses. Many of their holiday entries were about themselves and their families. An average of fifteen percent of picture writing entries pertained to holidays. Fifteen percent of the journal writing entries related to holidays.

Most of the stories were factual, not imaginative. Only one child, Lisa, wrote imaginative stories in both her picture writing journal and in her later journal entries. Three (16%) of the children wrote imaginative stories in their picture writing journals. More children (37%) chose imaginative stories to write in their later journal entries.

Hilliker (1982) found that topic repetition was not unusual in the writing of kindergarten children and children in this study also repeated topics. Similarly, in this study, children who made pictures about a certain topic seemed to write about these same topics. For example, one child drew many pictures about football games. When he began writing letters in his journal, he wrote about football games.

The children in this study were given an opportunity to socialize while journal writing. Rowe and Harste (1986, p. 132) explained the importance of socialization during the writing process: " It is through conversations with others that we begin to explain things to ourselves and to clarify our thinking." Children in this study sometimes got ideas for their writing from other children. For instance, children discussed the Alabama-Auburn football

game for several days prior to the game. Each day more children became involved in the discussion. They argued with each other about which team would win. These conversations with their classmates prompted many children to write about the game.

The children in this study chose their own topics without requiring suggestions from the teacher. The teacher occasionally made suggestions to the class regarding topic selection. There was only one instance where a child used the teacher's suggestion for the subject of his journal entry. The child had gotten a "spiked" haircut on the previous day. He was proud of the way that he looked with the new haircut. The teacher suggested that his haircut might be a good topic for his journal writing. The child followed her suggestion.

All of the children seemed to follow a developmental spelling pattern similar to the one set forth by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) and Manning, Long, Manning, and Kamii (1987). The spelling development of all of the children followed the same sequence, but the children did not advance at the same rate. The children seemed to focus first on the whole word, then the individual parts; they first used consonants and then consonants and vowels.

Since the journal entries are unique for each child, it is impossible to discuss all journal entries. The journals of four children were chosen for in-depth analysis. The children were chosen based on their different rates of advancement through the levels of spelling development. One child, Sara, did not advance; one, Steven, advanced one level; one, Anthony, advanced two levels; and one, Lisa, advanced three levels. Each of the entries discussed demonstrate an aspect of journal writing that is common to many of the children in this study.

Many of Sara's journal entries indicated that Sara copied words from around the room. She made lists of letters that she knew and words that she could spell. Figure 1 is typical of Sara's journal entries. In addition to repeating lists, Sara sometimes repeated main ideas for several journal entries. For example, during one week Sara drew houses for all five days of the week. Each house represented the house of someone in her family. In each journal entry, Sara described the house and the activities that occurred when she visited these houses.

Sara made many journal entries that were personal in nature. Twenty-eight percent of her picture writing entries and forty percent of her journal writing entries were personal.

In Figure 2, Sara appears to make her first attempt at spelling an isolated word that she didn't already know how to spell. In Figure 3, she used letter strings to write about the picture. Sara read her story: "When it was snowing, I went outside to build a snowman." There is no correspondence between the letters that she chose to write and the words that she read. When the study began, Sara was at the second level in spelling development. She did not show significant growth in her spelling development during the course of the study and remained at level two. However, she was willing to experiment with spelling and, although she had not advanced to another level, she made progress.

Steven, like Sara, made lists and copied words and letters that were displayed around the room. In his picture writing journals, these entries constituted eleven percent of the entries.

Steven liked to draw and write about things outdoors. Fourteen percent of his picture writing entries and twenty percent of his journal entries related to this topic. Figure 4 is an example of one of these entries.

On several occasions, Steven chose to make no entry in his picture writing writing journals. When he was asked to write letters and words in his journal, he chose to draw a picture seventy-two percent of the time.

Figure 5 shows that Steven tried to spell doghouse. Steven softly said the sounds in the word to himself as he wrote D. Next he tried to write the whole word, sounding it out as he went: DRHS for doghouse. He knew that there was something missing from dog, so he tried again: DRG for dog. Then he tried CAS for cats on the next line. Steven pronounced the word dog as if it were spelled drog. That is why he put an r in the word. It was not unusual for him and the other children to write the words as they pronounced them. They did not necessarily use the correct pronunciation and their spelling reflected the mispronunciation.

Figure 6 is an example of Steven's invented spelling. As with many journal entries, some interpretation is needed. M (Mister). DBUH (W), LS (likes), TO (to), B (blow), H (his), WSA (whistle). Most adults might think that Steven had simply written letters that have no correspondence to sounds. When looking at what he wrote, however, the letters seem logical. If the word whistle is pronounced slowly, one can almost hear an a at the end. When the study began, Steven was at level two. In January, he was at level three.

Anthony repeated topics. One of his favorite topics was sharks. He chose to write about sharks in twenty-two percent of his picture writing entries and forty-five percent of his journal writing entries. Figure 7 is a one word description of his picture.

Figure 8 shows Anthony wrote about about the Alabama-Auburn football game. This entry was a result of a discussion with his classmates. His writing of isolated words is very straightforward. The consonant order is

logical and correct. Anthony is at level three (consonantal) in his spelling development. He progressed two levels during the study.

Lisa, a very imaginative child, was one of the few children in this class to write imaginative stories. She continued to write such stories when she made the transition from a picture journal to a journal with letter and word entries. Twelve percent of the entries in her picture writing journal were imaginative stories; thirty-nine percent were imaginative in later journal entries. Lisa was also one of the few children to have journal entries that were retellings of stories.

Like many children at this level of writing development, Lisa did not have an established sense of directionality when trying to write a story. Her letters did not appear to correspond to what she was reading. Figure 9 shows her efforts to write: "Sun asked grass. Grass said, 'What are you doing?' I am doing something special for somebody's birthday." Lisa wrote down, then up, left, right, left; she went all over the page. Some of the words can be picked out: RAS (grass); RRUDE (What are you doing?); SED (said); SMP ((something). Like Steven, Lisa spelled words as she said them. She pronounced the word what as rut. Thus, the first R in RRUDE is for the word what. She pronounced the word something as sumpin (SMP). Since she sounded out the words as she wrote, she wrote what she heard herself say.

CONCLUSION

Children in this study chose their own topics for journal writing with little difficulty. Because of the egocentric nature of the children at this age, it was expected that they would write about themselves and their interests. The topics that the children in this study chose to write about did tend to be "me centered". Children liked to write about themselves, their families, friends, pets, and houses. Holidays were a favorite topic, especially as it related to them. Few imaginative stories were written; the children tended to write factual stories that were personal in nature.

As in Hilliker's study (1982), the children in this study sometimes repeated a favorite topic in their writing. Not every child repeated topics. Some wrote on a wide variety of subjects.

Most of the children in this study showed some growth in their writing development. They were allowed the freedom to choose their own writing topics and explore their own spelling of words.

This study demonstrated that writing is a social activity. It was evident that the children gained from interaction with each other. They sometimes helped each other with spelling and topic selection.

One important idea that was supported by this study is that language and spelling are both developmental processes. Children progress through several levels before they reach conventional speech and spelling. This study demonstrated that children progressed through various levels of development similar to those described by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) and Manning, Long, Manning, and Kamii (1987). The children did not progress in their spelling development at the same rate, but most children showed some growth.

The children spelled by sounding out the word to themselves. Then they wrote what they heard as they pronounced each word. If a child mispronounced a word, the spelling reflected the mispronunciation.

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Table 1
Results of the Developmental Spelling Test

Student	Level (Sept., 1987)	Level (Jan., 1988)	Change
1	0	2	+2
2	0	3	+3
3	2	2*	0
4	3	3*	0
5	2	3*	+1
6(Anthony)	1	3	+2
7	2	2	0
8(Sara)	2	2	0
9	0	1*	+1
10	2	3	+1
11	3	4	+1
12	2	3*	+1
13(Steven)	2	3	+1
14	2	3	+1
15	0	3	+3
16	0	3	+3
17(Lisa)	0	3	+3
18	1	2	+1
19	0	---	---

* Indicates that the child is beginning to use some of the characteristics of the next developmental level.
Child 19 missed the last two weeks of journal writing and the January developmental spelling test due to an extended illness.

Table 2
Picture Writing Topic Selection

	School Related	No Entry	Scribbles	Copying	Lists	Letters/ Numbers	House	Sun	Outdoors	Rainbow
Child										
1*	0	3	0	0	0	5	6	5	8	7
2	0	3	0	0	0	10	8	3	4	2
3	0	0	0	3	17	5	0	0	17	2
4	0	10	1	2	5	5	1	1	0	6
5	5	0	0	2	2	9	0	2	2	0
6 (Anthony)	0	0	3	0	1	8	5	1	12	0
7	2	1	3	0	1	2	7	1	12	0
8 (Sara)	1	1	0	19	0	3	12	4	4	6
9	0	0	0	0	5	7	14	2	0	3
10	1	2	0	1	2	2	8	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	1	1	6	10	2	0	3
12	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	0	1	1
13 (Steven)	2	5	0	4	2	9	13	1	7	0
14	4	3	18	0	0	10	1	2	3	2
15	3	6	5	2	0	5	13	1	8	3
16	2	1	1	1	1	10	4	2	4	0
17 (Lisa)	0	0	1	5	5	1	2	4	6	6
18	0	2	0	0	0	21	9	5	0	4
19*	2	5	4	2	0	2	1	0	10	0

* Indicates the child was reluctant to share journal entries

Table 2 (continued)

Child	Me	Family	Friends	Pets and Animals	Holidays	Imaginative Stories	Other People	Special Events	Other Topics	Total Entries
1*	4	5	7	0	1	0	1	0	0	48
2	15	5	10	0	6	0	0	0	3	57
3	0	16	0	6	9	0	0	0	0	47
4	5	3	2	4	8	0	3	0	0	51
5	18	15	6	0	9	0	5	2	6	66
6 (Anthony)	1	2	3	11	3	0	3	2	0	51
7	12	4	10	6	8	0	3	0	0	64
8 (Sara)	12	8	2	0	0	0	6	0	0	43
9	9	15	1	1	15	0	0	1	0	59
10	5	2	6	3	24	0	4	2	0	50
11	3	1	3	3	21	0	7	1	2	62
12	2	6	8	8	8	5	5	0	2	47
13 (Steven)	0	1	0	2	8	0	2	0	1	56
14	6	4	7	1	9	0	2	1	2	71
15	9	2	8	0	6	0	8	1	2	47
16	5	8	9	0	9	1	4	9	4	69
17 (Lisa)	2	0	5	10	7	7	9	5	0	60
18	1	9	0	2	1	0	8	0	0	50
19*	4	0	3	2	10	0	2	6	8	59

* Indicates the child was reluctant to share journal entries

Table 3
Journal Writing Topic Selection

	School Related	No Entry	Picture Only	Letters/ Numbers	Lists	Copying	Houses	Sun	Outdoors	Rainbow
Child										
1*	0	0	12	0	0	2	11	5	7	5
2	3	1	6	2	0	0	18	8	7	11
3	6	0	7	3	4	1	2	9	1	6
4	2	0	6	2	1	1	1	0	1	6
5	0	0	8	2	1	1	12	0	3	0
6 (Anthony)	2	0	8	0	1	0	8	1	2	1
7	1	0	6	7	0	0	4	3	3	1
8 (Sara)	0	0	10	5	6	0	5	8	18	14
9	1	0	1	0	2	1	15	3	2	2
10	3	0	6	1	2	0	0	0	1	1
11	4	0	1	2	7	0	3	0	2	2
12	1	0	4	1	0	0	9	0	2	2
13 (Steven)	8	1	28	3	0	0	8	4	3	1
14	2	0	5	7	2	0	5	0	2	1
15	5	1	2	1	0	0	30	2	2	1
16	3	0	2	0	2	0	11	0	8	4
17 (Lisa)	4	0	0	7	0	0	9	3	1	1
18	3	0	0	1	0	4	4	3	1	1
19*	1	0	5	1	0	0	2	0	0	1

* Indicates the child was reluctant to share journal entries

Table 3 (continued)

	Me	Family	Friends	Pets and Animals	Holidays	Seasons	Imaginative Stories	Other People	Other Topics	Special Events	Story Retelling	Total Entries
Child												
1*	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	36
2	4	1	8	0	4	4	1	4	4	0	0	45
3	0	1	0	5	5	0	0	0	4	0	0	39
4	0	0	0	6	3	1	7	0	9	1	1	35
5	2	2	2	0	4	0	0	1	10	0	0	44
6 (Anthony)	1	1	1	15	1	0	0	2	5	2	0	33
7	0	0	0	1	11	2	0	3	5	0	0	39
8 (Sara)	5	6	2	0	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	45
9	3	12	3	0	14	2	0	0	1	1	0	34
10	1	4	1	4	6	1	1	2	9	0	0	43
11	2	3	1	10	14	1	1	1	2	0	0	41
12	0	3	4	6	7	3	0	3	5	0	0	45
13 (Steven)	0	1	2	2	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	39
14	1	3	2	3	5	3	2	0	3	0	0	35
15	5	3	2	1	13	0	1	2	0	0	0	38
16	8	2	1	7	6	2	0	1	2	0	1	47
17 (Lisa)	0	1	1	4	3	3	15	2	0	1	3	38
18	1	8	0	4	2	0	5	0	1	0	1	28
19*	2	0	3	0	5	3	0	0	6	14	0	39

* Indicates the child was reluctant to share journal entries

Figure 1
Sara made a list of words that she knew.

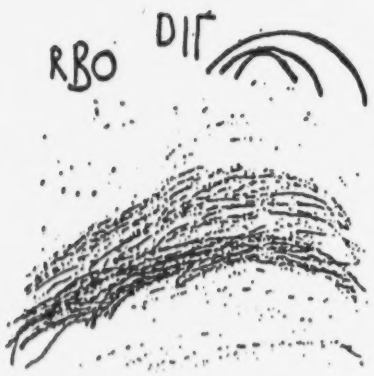

Figure 2
Sara's first attempt at spelling an isolated word.

Figure 3
Sara wrote letters, but the words that she attempted to write cannot yet be discerned.

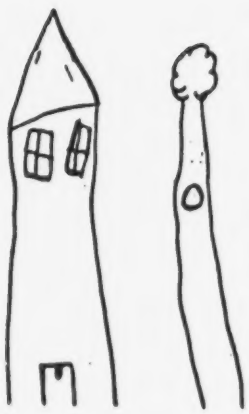

Figure 4
Steven liked to write about the outdoors.

Figure 5
Steven wrote doghouse and cats.

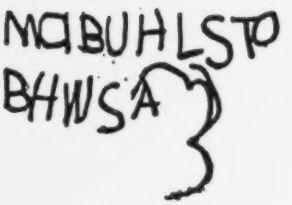

Figure 6
Mr. W likes to blow his whistle.

Figure 7
Anthony liked to write about sharks.

Figure 8
Anthony's topic was a football game.

Figure 9
Lisa's story about the sun and the grass.

APPENDIX A

Developmental Spelling Test

A developmental spelling test (Manning, Long, Manning, and Kamii, 1987) was given to each child in September, 1987 and again in January, 1988. The tests were given outside the classroom. Children were tested individually. They were asked to write down the letters that they thought spelled the word that the researcher said. After writing the ten words, the children were asked to write a sentence. The words were given in the same order each time. The words were analyzed according to the levels established by Manning, Long. Manning, and Kamii. [Level zero is drawing and scribbling.] Level one consists of letter strings that are undifferentiated. There is no maximum or minimum quantity of the number of letters. In level two, the child writes letter strings, but the strings have a maximum of seven letters and a minimum of three letters. Level three (consonantal) is the level in which the child writes the basic consonants in the word. Level four (alphabetic) is the level in which vowels appear. After this level, the child then spells words using the conventional spelling.

The ten words and the sentence that the children wrote are listed below.

1. vacation
2. cement
3. motion
4. punishment
5. tomato
6. ocean
7. karate
8. taco
9. cat
10. cats

The giraffe eats leaves.